

# 'Cool School' teaches arctic survival

*Posted 12/1/2011*

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12/1/2011 - **EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska (AFNS)** -- Surviving in the wilderness could be intimidating for some, but doing so during a brutal Alaskan winter could be downright scary.

Detachment 1, 66th Training Squadron's Arctic Survival Training course, which began here recently, offers students a set of skills invaluable to enduring the subarctic climate of interior Alaska and the extreme cold.

The "Cool School" is a weeklong course providing students lessons to better implement survival, evasion, resistance and escape principles as well as become familiar with the environment, said Staff Sgt. Mark Dornford, a Det. 1, 66th TRS SERE specialist. The course primarily caters to aircrew members who may find themselves in a survival situation.

In comparison to other survival courses, what makes the class unique is its arctic setting, forcing students to endure plummeting temperatures during the dark, cold interior-Alaskan winter.

"The biggest challenge is overcoming the (extreme) cold," Dornford said. "A lot of our students already have basic survival skills. This course takes that extra step by adapting it to cold weather."

Before students step into the field to test their newfound survival skills, they must receive proper instruction. The course is divided into two days of classroom instruction and three days in the field to give students ample time to apply what they have learned.

"One of the biggest take-aways from the course is people see how anyone can survive when it's minus 50; it can be done," Dornford said. "The biggest eye-opener is probably when they spend the night (in the field) waking up in fifty or forty below still alive and still able to meet their needs. They realize they can do it."

There are five of those basic needs: health, personal protection -- clothing, shelter, fire and equipment -- sustenance, signaling and communication, and travel.

"(The course) lets you know you can do a whole lot with a little," said Tech. Sgt. Marcos Gonzalez, the 354th Comptroller Squadron NCO in charge of commander support staff and a unit deployment manager. "After going through the course, it made me realize that I could still meet my needs and do work."

The course also teaches the student the importance of recognizing the potential outcome of each decision made, especially in subzero temperatures, added Gonzalez.

In addition to building confidence in meeting the five basic needs, students must overcome mental barriers, choosing to trust the materials separating them from the winter elements, ultimately helping keep them warm and dry. From socks to skullcaps and each layer in between, individuals realize the importance of their clothing in surviving extreme temperatures.

However, "(students) do not really believe their gear is going to be enough until they see it (in action), and then it begins to click," Dornford said.

The survival skills taught here are applicable to just about anyone, especially in areas with extreme winter weather conditions, according to officials. Unfortunately, every Airman may not be able to attend this or a similar course.

However, basic knowledge of what to do in an emergency situation could make a difference when it comes to surviving the elements, according to officials. People who live and work in areas with extreme winter weather conditions should keep cold weather items close. A cold weather sleeping bag, fire starting materials, road flares, headlamp or flashlight, metal container for melting snow and high energy foods are just a few things that can help when faced with a survival situation.

For more winter weather safety tips, visit the National Oceanic and Atmospheric winter safety page at [www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/index.shtml](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/index.shtml).